

**Cooperative Education  
(Co-op)  
Program Guide**

**For**

**Supervisors/Mentors**

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(as of 05/2004)**

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## INTRODUCTION

The information contained in this handbook is intended to answer your questions regarding the Cooperative Education (Co-op) Program at the NASA Langley Research Center. Referring to it will assist you in your role as a Co-op Supervisor/Mentor. If you have any questions, please contact the Co-op Program Coordinator in the Office of Human Resources, Mail Stop 174 or e-mail at [LaRC-Co-op@larc.nasa.gov](mailto:LaRC-Co-op@larc.nasa.gov).

## COOPERATIVE EDUCATION DEFINED

Co-op began in 1906 at the University of Cincinnati solely for engineering majors. Today it is available to students at over 1,000 colleges and universities nationwide. Approximately 200,000 plus students are presently enrolled in Co-op programs with over 50,000 employers.

The program is called “Co-op” because it involves a cooperative effort on the part of colleges, employers, and students to form an exceptional educational program. Working together, a synergistic learning process is created that integrates classroom studies with supervised work experiences. Students are employed for a semester at a time in positions related to their major field of study and career objectives. The process alternates work and study. An example of a Co-op work tour is: a 3-month tour initially, and after that, the student may return for another 3-month tour. Scheduling may vary because of school requirements. Therefore, a Co-op tour can differ from the one described above. The only requirement is that the Co-op works at least one semester and one summer tour. Co-op program is **NOT** strictly “summer work” nor is it a short “internship.” The program is designed to provide the student with increasing responsibility commensurate with increased academic skills and experience gained from previous school and work terms.

The primary objective of the program is to provide the Center with a source of trained and highly motivated employees who are familiar with Center’s activities and are ready to assume their place in the permanent workforce immediately upon graduation and successful completion of the Co-op Program. For this reason, the distribution of skill types within the program closely mirrors the Center’s professional workforce as a whole.

## BENEFITS OF COOPERATIVE EDUCATION

To the supervisor/mentor and the Center:

- Provides continuous source of new talent and original ideas.
- Provides cost-effective recruitment, training, and retention vehicle.
- Permits input into the educational process.
- Provides an opportunity to preview potential full-time employees in actual work situations.

- Aids in meeting affirmative action goals through identification, placement, and development of qualified minority candidates. Thus enhancing our diversity workforce.
- Allows senior employees the chance to mentor and train younger employees for NASA Langley's future.

To the student:

- Provides practical experience in applying academic principles and theories.
- Helps in determining general and specific career opportunities and goals.
- Develops confidence, interpersonal skills, and professional work habits.
- Increases motivation and desire to learn.
- Allows exposure to state-of-the-art equipment and practices.
- Provides all Federal benefits.
- Allows a potential offer of permanent/term employment to be made upon successful completion of the program and graduation.

To the school:

- Offers feedback on current practices in the working community.
- Furnishes information on employment trends.
- Strengthens rapport with community.

## EXPECTATIONS AND ROLES

When a Co-op student has been placed in your organization, it is you (**the supervisor/mentor**) who plays a central and crucial role in the success of the Co-op Program. The two most important ingredients for a successful experience are the establishment of a mentoring relationship and the quality of the work assignments. Here are some ideas to help foster effective development of a Co-op:

- All Co-op Supervisors and Mentors are required to review LaRC Sexual Harassment Policy (<http://oeop.larc.nasa.gov/SexualHarassmentPolicy.pdf>)
- Whenever possible, meet the student on their first day at the Office of Human Resources when they report to work or have someone designated to do so.
- Introduce the Co-op to fellow workers.
- Plan well-defined work assignments before the student's arrival.
- Assign projects of increasing responsibilities and challenges.
- Vary the assigned tasks to expand learning opportunities.
- Set time schedules for follow-up and task completion.
- Provide an alternate resource person for the student to consult in case you are not available and brief this person on their role as an alternate source of guidance.
- Encourage the student to ask questions and develop an on-going communication system.
- Expect the Co-op to be a productive and contributing member of the group.
- Discuss career and academic goals.

- Discuss opportunities in their next assignment/rotation.
- Encourage participation in Center activities.
- Assist student in adapting to the work-world environment by planning routines, organizational structure, responsibilities, and expectations.
- Provide printed information or Web sites about your area whenever possible (e.g., acronyms, organizational chart, information resources, WebTADS, and security procedures.
- Familiarize the student with telephone system.
- Provide feedback to students through performance plans and appraisals.

## **CO-OP ARRIVAL/LOGISTICS PREPARATION**

Before your Co-op reports for duty, the following preparations should be made:

- A desk, computer, e-mail account, and telephone number should be ready for the Co-op's use the first day on duty.
- Once the Co-op reports to you after employee in-processing, someone should introduce the Co-op to their fellow employees and inform the Co-op where the Credit Union, cafeteria are located and other facilities that may be of useful for the student.

## **APPOINTMENT GRADE AND PROMOTIONS**

All Co-ops are given Schedule B Excepted Appointments. This type of appointment enables noncompetitive conversion of Co-ops to a term appointment or full-time career employment after graduation. The student's number of completed college credits will determine the initial appointment grade level. Undergraduate level Co-ops are typically appointed at the GS-04 while graduate level Co-ops are usually appointed at the GS-07.

Periodically, Co-ops become eligible for promotion. Promotion eligibility is described below.

### **Clerical and Technician Student Trainee Positions**

Grade	Level of Education
GS-1	High School Student
GS-2	High School Graduate/Equiv.
GS-3	Complete 1 Year of Study Post H.S.
GS-4	Complete 2 Years of Study Post H.S.

**Scientific & Engineering and Professional Administrative  
Student Trainee Positions**

Grade	Level of Education
GS-4	College Sophomore
GS-5	College Junior
GS-6	College Senior
GS-7	Masters Program or College Graduate
GS-9	Doctorate Program or Completion of 1 Year of Masters Level Study
GS-11	Doctorate Program (Research) or Completion of 1 year of Doctorate Level Study

**LEAVE/LEAVE WITHOUT PAY (LWOP) AND CHECK-OUT PROCEDURES**

**Annual Leave**

Except in unforeseen circumstances, annual leave must be requested sufficiently in advance to permit fair and equitable scheduling of leave for all employees in the work unit while ensuring the efficient accomplishment of work. In the event of an unscheduled absence, the employee is expected to request approval as soon as possible (generally within the first 2 hours of the workday).

**Sick Leave**

Personal sick leave is appropriate when an employee is incapacitated for the performance of duties by sickness, injury, or for pregnancy and confinement; or for medical, dental, or optical examination or treatment; or when exposure to contagious disease could jeopardize the health of others. In addition, the Federal Employees Family Friendly Leave Act (FEFFLA) expands the use of sick leave by a limited number of hours for

general family care and bereavement; to provide care for a family member as a result of a physical or mental illness, injury, pregnancy, childbirth, medical, dental, optical examination or treatment, or for other serious health condition; to make arrangements necessitated by the death of a family member or to attend the funeral of a family member.

Employees using sick leave under the FEFFLA should charge the applicable time to FFSL. Employees who have invoked the Family and Medical Leave Act should charge their time to the appropriate code (FMAL, FMSL, FMSS or FMLLW).

Sick leave accrues without limitation as to how much can be accumulated. Judicious use of sick leave can prove extremely beneficial. During periods of extended absence, accumulated sick leave can act as an insurance policy by keeping an employee in a pay status throughout the duration of the illness.

#### Advanced Sick Leave

Advanced sick leave may be granted for serious disability or illness when an employee has exhausted available sick leave, and may not exceed 240 hours. When it is known at the time a request for advanced sick leave is made that the employee will not return to duty, it will not be granted.

#### LWOP

When Co-ops return to school at the completion of each work tour, they are placed in a LWOP status. The Co-op student must report to the Co-op Program Coordinator to receive an official LWOP briefing 2 weeks prior to leaving.

#### **A SUPERVISOR'S EVALUATION OF COOPERATIVE STUDENT FORM (Attached)**

This form (NASA Langley Form 263, Dec 2002) must be completed and should be discussed with the student before the last day of the work tour. The student also completes an evaluation of the work tour, which may also be discussed. An unsatisfactory performance rating is a basis for termination. Students have been thoroughly informed of all these procedures.

#### **TRAVEL REQUEST AND AUTHORIZATION FORM (if student is not local)**

The Co-op Program Office furnishes all Co-op travel cost. With the following stipulations, students are not eligible to receive travel money for their first trip to Langley or their last trip back to school before graduation. Students are eligible for all intervening travel to Langley and return travel to school. This policy only applies to students attending from non local universities.

## FEDERAL BENEFITS

Co-ops are paid Federal employees and are entitled to all the benefits of Federal employment (e.g., annual, holiday, and sick leave and health and life insurance).

## OVERTIME HOURS

Some Langley work units occasionally need their Co-ops to work overtime due to heavy workloads. This is allowed as long as the additional hours do not interfere with the Co-ops schoolwork. This includes time for the Co-op student to complete research, studying for exams, accomplishing homework, etc. The students schooling is the most important consideration and will be given first priority. Overtime hours will not be paid for by the Co-op Program Office funds. The overtime funds will be directly charged to the job order for which the hours were utilized. Full time Co-op Students can earn credit hours. Credit hours are non-overtime work for which the employee receives no additional pay. Full-time employees (co-ops) may accumulate and carry forward no more than 24 hours from pay period to pay period. Part-time employees may accumulate one quarter of the biweekly scheduled work hours. Employees are reminded that WebTADS does not have a means to keep employees from posting and accumulating more than 24 hours when they post their time. Once WebTADS data is processed into the NASA Personnel/Payroll System, the system will automatically drop any credit hours posted in excess of the maximum. Therefore, employees are reminded they should not work past the 24-hour limit and they cannot volunteer hours. (Ensure the credit hours program is not abused)

## TERMINATIONS

Unsatisfactory work performance (including attendance and punctuality problems) should be dealt with separately by contacting the Co-op Program Director: This is to insure that the appropriate Employee Relations steps are followed: These issues must be discussed with the co-op student by the supervisor/mentor. Clear documentation must be kept by the supervisor/mentor on all incidents, counseling sessions, etc. If the problems are not resolved and the student receives an unsatisfactory evaluation, the student may be terminated. A Co-op student may also be terminated for any of the following reasons:

- Resignation.
- Change in academic major, which will not qualify him/her for a position.
- Suspension, expulsion, or withdrawal from the educational institution.
- Unsatisfactory work performance based upon the supervisor and the Co-op Program Director's evaluation and recommendation. Failure to maintain academic standards (e.g. GPA).
- Failure to adhere to the standards set forth in the Co-op Agreement. Inability of the Agency to retain the student in the position for various reasons (e.g. administrative, manpower, financial, lack of projects (work), etc.)



## **EMPLOYMENT AFTER COMPLETION OF PROGRAM REQUIREMENTS**

Within 120 calendar days after completing educational requirements, the employing agency **may** non-competitively convert a student to a term, career, or career-conditional appointment. Students must have satisfactorily completed study-related work for baccalaureate and associate, master or doctoral degree program. Tentative offers may be made no earlier than nine months prior to the Co-op Student completing their educational requirements. Supervisors/mentors must contact the Co-op Coordinator prior to a tentative offer being made to a Co-op student.